

*Memoir of P. F. Rothermel.*

*By Joseph G. Rosengarten.*

*(Read before the American Philosophical Society, November 1, 1895.)*

Peter F. Rothermel, who died August 15, 1895, in his eighty-third year, was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society, January 17, 1873, in recognition of his distinction as an artist. Born at Nescopach, Luzerne county, Pa., July 18, 1812, he came to Philadelphia in 1820, where, after the ordinary common school education, his father put him to studying land surveying, ignoring the boy's decided tendency to artistic pursuits, indicated at a very early age. At twenty-two he overcame paternal opposition and began to study art under John R. Smith and later under Bass Otis, a portrait painter. At thirty he married and settled to work in what was then known as "Art Row," on Sansom street, east of Eighth. From 1847 to 1855 he was a Director of the Academy of Fine Arts; in 1856 he went abroad for three years, studying in Rome and in other Italian cities, and in England, France, Germany and Belgium, thus equipping himself for his profession. In 1859, on his return home, he was elected a member of the Academy and gave his pupils the benefit of his own studies.

Among his well-known historical pictures are "De Soto Discovering the Mississippi," "Columbus Before Isabella the Catholic," "The Embarkation of Columbus," a series of pictures illustrating Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, "Van Dyke and Rubens," "King Lear," "The Virtuoso," "Christian Martyrs in the Coliseum," "Patrick Henry before the Virginia House of Burgesses," "Paul at Ephesus," "Paul Preaching on Mars Hill," "Paul Before Agrippa," "Trial of Sir Henry Vane," "The Landsknecht," "St. Agnes" (owned in St. Petersburg), "Christabel," and "Katharine and Petruccio." Many of them have been engraved, thus spreading his fame and making his work known far and wide, so that he was recognized as one of our leading artists. After the close of the Civil War he was commissioned by the State of Pennsylvania to paint a picture illustrating the Battle of Gettysburg, and this great canvas, surrounded by a series of sketches of episodes in the battle, now hangs in the State Capitol at Harrisburg.

Even in his old age he loved his art and was a friendly critic of young artists, making them happy by his sympathy and encouragement, and he was a welcome guest at all their meetings, where he revived the traditions of his own early associates—David Edwin, the engraver, a storyteller of great excellence, who set the table in a roar after the first round of punch; Russell Smith, Thomas Ashton, Joseph Kyle, Thomas Officer, Holmes—at the meetings of the old Artists' Fund, at the hotel in George street above Sixth. His old age was graceful and genial, and his memory

as a man and as an artist is one that will long be dear to all who knew and loved him.

The Rothermels came originally from Germany by way of Holland, the first American of the name reaching Pennsylvania in 1703. His descendants settled in the romantic valley of the Wyoming, where the future artist was born. He in turn became the father of three children—one son is a successful member of the Philadelphia Bar. The country home of Rothermel was the scene of his quiet old age, where his friends, young and old, enjoyed his pleasant reminiscences of his long and active life, of his meeting with the great artists abroad and at home, and his genial and kindly encouragement to the younger artists was always generously given. His visits to the city and to the Academy of Fine Arts and other gathering places of artists were always the occasion of hearty greetings and he modestly received the praise of his numerous admirers.

His family have a short autobiographical memoir in which Mr. Rothermel makes due acknowledgment of his earliest friends, among them Col. Cephas G. Childs, himself an engraver of excellent taste and discernment, and Prof. J. J. Mapes, of New York, and in Philadelphia, the Messrs. Edward and Henry C. Carey, James L. Claghorn, Henry C. Gibson, and others, gave him valuable and substantial recognition by commissions which enabled him to go abroad and perfect himself in the great foreign art schools and galleries. He speaks in terms of generous praise of Leutze and Frankenstein, and in the warmest admiration of Thomas Sully, the leading painter of female heads in this country after Gilbert Stuart, who was passing off the stage as Sully came on it. His skill, grace, color, gave his portraits of women a beauty quite his own, and some of his portraits of men are of a high order of excellence, but most of all Rothermel dwells on Sully's charm of manner, his genial nature, his sympathy for young artists, and the beautiful old age spent in the house and the studio that was one of the landmarks of the city, just across the way from the rooms of the American Philosophical Society, where there are excellent examples of his work.

Mr. Rothermel, like the late Mr. Lambdin, was elected a Director of the Academy of Fine Arts in recognition of his excellence as a man, as well as his distinction as an artist, and he worked hard for the establishment of the schools that contribute so much to the value and importance of the Academy. On its walls hang some of his early and some of his best pictures. He himself says that in one of them he introduced copies of the original casts of the persons figuring in his historical portraits, and justifies this as far better than the fashion set by Cornelius and other German artists of copying largely from Raphael as an evidence of admiration. As Chairman of the Committee on Education of the Academy he labored hard to elevate the standard of its schools and with substantial success. He suggested the purchase of copies of casts of the best examples of Greek and Roman sculpture, for the use of the antique school,

the opening of the library of the Academy to artists and art students, and that public lectures on art be given in the Academy regularly. He also urged improvements in the life schools, and annual prizes for the best paintings and drawings of the pupils from life, from the antique, and of architectural subjects, and thus he aided in the establishment on a sound basis of the schools that have now grown to be so important a part of the work of the Academy, and so influential an element in the sound training in art in this city. His only official recognition was his election as an Academician, an honor shared with Sartain and good workers in the cause of art and art education in this city. Mr. Rothermel always claimed that artists should have a larger share in the management of the Academy of Fine Arts, and thus keep pace with the great foreign academies in which the administration is entrusted to the leaders in the various branches of art. He attributes the success of numerous art associations in New York to the energy of the artists in their management, and thinks that the growth of art in New York is largely due to their constant presentation to the public of the best examples of foreign and American art. In writing in his old age, in the retirement of his country home, he dwells on the want of recognition of artists in this country, where art is too often looked on as a trade which requires no capital, and against this view he says, "Labor is the badge of all our tribe, and no amount of talent or genius can do without it. The artist's own love of art is his best incentive. The love of nature and of truth, a firm determination to do the best, to express from his own standpoint, his own vision, paramount, and then in spite of laughter from friends and sneers from enemies—the artist who can stand all this, has been at least true to himself."

In 1856 Rothermel went abroad, armed with twenty commissions, secured for him by James L. Claghorn, one of his kindest, most generous and most constant friends. He visited London, Brussels, Paris, Antwerp (where his enjoyment of Rubens recalled a story that when Eichholz disparaged Rubens to Neagle, and asked the latter what he would say if he, Eichholz, painted as good a picture as Rubens' "Descent from the Cross," it was said in view of a copy exhibited in Philadelphia, and Neagle brusquely answered, "Say!" said Neagle, "I would say, here is a new miracle!") Dusseldorf, where he found Leutze hard at work; up the Rhine, through Switzerland, the Italian lakes, Genoa, Venice, where he says he was taken captive by its beautiful architecture, "the enemy of the correct and classic;" Florence, where he went seriously to work in the study of the old masters; then Rome, where he remained from October, 1856, to June, 1858, spending some time in the picturesque neighboring villages. He painted "King Lear," for Mr. Joseph Harrison; a "St. Agnes," which went to St. Petersburg, and a "Rubens and VanDyke," also bought by a Russian. He met and made friends with Page, Terry, Chapman, Freeman, Akers, Ives, Rogers, Bartholomew, and with them discussed art. At Orvieto he met Hawthorne, eloquent

even in his shy way. At Perugia, Assisi, Arezzo, Bologna, Ferrara, Verona and Padua, he studied the great masters, and at Ferrara he met William Cullen Bryant; at Florence, Powers; and each city had its lesson. He studied Titian and Tintoretto and Paul Veronese in Venice, and compares them with careful analysis of their special qualities. Passing by Verona and Botzen and Innsbruck to Munich, where he saw the works of Cornelius and Kaulbach and Hess, all feeble after the great Italians, yet noteworthy and carefully criticised by Rothermel, he visited Nuremberg and Dresden, Leipsic and Berlin, returning by way of Strasburg to Paris, where he exhibited some of his own pictures in the Salon of 1859, receiving honorable mention and escaping (as he puts it) a medal, because the supply was exhausted by the French artists. Returning to Philadelphia, Mr. Joseph Harrison gave him a studio, where he painted "King Lear" (still in Mr. Harrison's gallery); he first made a sketch portrait of Forrest for the head, but afterwards made it entirely ideal, the better to express his own fancy. His productions were bought by Messrs. Clarence H. Clark, John Rice, Matthew Baird, H. C. Gibson, Charles Gibson, E. H. Fidler, W. Dougherty, James S. Martin, and thus he was honored in his own home. He notes that Sully was reported to have received but seventy-five dollars for his fine portrait of George Frederic Cook, the tragedian, which Rothermel thinks "perhaps the very best life-size portrait in the country." In his autobiographical memoir—only a fragment—he records the fact that he painted his "Gettysburg" in Mr. Harrison's studio, and his intention of describing his preparation, his studies and his gradual progress, but unfortunately nothing of this is preserved. It is greatly to be regretted that he did not thus put on record his own story of his greatest picture, that it might be printed as the artist's own analysis. The picture has a place of honor in Harrisburg in the Hall of Trophies of the State Capitol.

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*Jasper and Stalagmite Quarried by Indians in the Wyandotte Cave.*

*By H. C. Mercer.*

*(Read before the American Philosophical Society, November 16, 1895.)*

I beg to call the attention of the Society to these objects from the Wyandotte cave in Indiana, as illustrating one of the features of what might be called the comparatively modern archaeology of caverns, one of the relations of the daily life of the North American Indian to subterranean galleries in the limestone.

Before describing the specimens, from the Museum of American and Prehistoric Archaeology of the University of Pennsylvania, let me say that I have been drawn into the exploration of caves in the hope of finding in the *Cultur Schichten*, as the Germans call them, or the layers of human rubbish superposed in series on the subterranean floors by